

handled at the VA and will crack down on instances of harassment and discrimination within the Department.

Nobody should feel unsafe at work. The care VA employees provide for our veterans is absolutely critical, but they cannot provide that best care, the care our veterans deserve, if they are suffering in a hostile work environment.

Not only is this an accountability and workplace safety issue, it is a disservice to our veterans who rely on the VA for high-quality care, and a disservice to taxpayers who fund the Department.

We can do better, and this legislation will ensure that those who serve our veterans feel safe at work so they can do their jobs effectively.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support this important bipartisan legislation.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, I am prepared to close, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleagues to support this bill.

With that, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask all my colleagues to join me in passing this important piece of legislation, H.R. 2704, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2704.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to section 3(s) of House Resolution 8, the yeas and nays are ordered.

Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion are postponed.

VA EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COUNSELOR MODERNIZATION ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2788) to amend title 38, United States Code, to eliminate the cap on full-time employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs who provide equal employment opportunity counseling.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2788

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “VA Equal Employment Opportunity Counselor Modernization Act”.

SEC. 2. ELIMINATION OF CAP ON FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS WHO PROVIDE EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COUNSELING.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 516 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking subsection (g); and
(2) by redesignating subsection (h) as subsection (g).

(b) REPORT.—Not later than 60 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report regarding the effect of the amendment under subsection (a).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on H.R. 2788.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support Representative LAMB’s bipartisan legislation, the VA Equal Employment Opportunity Counselor Modernization Act, which is cosponsored by Representative MANN.

This bill would help the Department address diversity and equity issues within VA’s workforce. It removes a portion of a 1997 law that limits the number of VA counselors who can advise employees on equal employment opportunity issues, provides alternative dispute resolution, and helps process formal complaints.

VA’s workforce has roughly doubled in size since the 1997 law was enacted, and VA requested for the limit to be removed to allow the Department to hire additional counselors to support the needs of a large and still growing workforce.

Our Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee recently held a hearing to examine important steps to address workforce diversity and inclusion at VA. At this hearing, the subcommittee, once again, learned how important these counselors are. This bill builds off that oversight and will assist VA’s efforts to support its workforce, which serves veterans every single day.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to join me in supporting this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2788, the VA Equal Employment Opportunity Counselor Modernization Act.

Current law prohibits VA from having more than 40 full-time EEO coun-

selors. With a workforce of around 400,000, that is only one counselor for every 10,000 employees.

This arbitrary cap has hamstrung VA, and we have heard from the Department and stakeholders that the lack of counselors prevents VA from addressing complaints quickly. H.R. 2788 would remove this cap and finally allow VA to rightsize its need for EEO counselors.

I thank Congressman CONOR LAMB and Ranking Member TRACEY MANN for introducing and leading this common-sense legislation. I am pleased to support it this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. LAMB), my good friend and the author of this bipartisan legislation, H.R. 2788; and a member of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs.

Mr. LAMB. Mr. Speaker, I think the key term that Ranking Member BOST used was “common sense.” That can sometimes be in short supply around here.

When we found out that the VA has roughly the same number of EEOC counselors today—38—that it had in 1997, you ask yourself the simple question: Well, what else has happened at the VA since that time?

Their workforce has nearly doubled. Since 1997, the VA has become one of the largest Federal agencies, with a workforce of over 400,000 people, which means those same 38 EEOC counselors are handling roughly double the amount of complaints of unfair and illegal discrimination today that they were in 1997.

See, the law placed an artificial cap on the number of counselors, but it did not place a cap on the amount of unjust discrimination in our society. That has continued. If anything, the last year has shown us how deep and intransigent racial discrimination, sex discrimination, and other illegal forms of discrimination remain in our society and how we have to take active steps to dismantle them wherever we find them.

Unfair and illegal discrimination exists at the VA. It doesn’t make me proud to say it as a veteran, as a lawmaker, as a public servant, but it exists there just like it exists everywhere else. These folks know how to deal with it. They know how to listen. They know how to make the employees feel like they have a safe place to go and tell their side of the story. They know how to stick up for these employees who are giving their careers to helping our veterans.

All we need to do is lift the cap, and the VA will hire EEOC counselors who can do their job effectively and take care of those who are taking care of our veterans every day.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I, again, urge all of my colleagues to join me in

passing this important piece of legislation, H.R. 2788.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2788.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to section 3(s) of House Resolution 8, the yeas and nays are ordered.

Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion are postponed.

VA TRANSPARENCY & TRUST ACT OF 2021

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2911) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress a plan for obligating and expending Coronavirus pandemic funding made available to the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2911

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “VA Transparency & Trust Act of 2021”.

SEC. 2. CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT OF CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC FUNDING MADE AVAILABLE TO DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) PLAN AND REPORTS BY SECRETARY.—

(1) PLAN.—Not later than 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a detailed plan for obligating and expending covered funds, including a detailed justification for each type of obligation of such funds.

(2) BIWEEKLY REPORTS.—Every 14 days during the period beginning on the date on which the plan under paragraph (1) is submitted and ending seven days after the date on which the Secretary has expended all covered funds, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report detailing the obligation and expenditure of, and the planned uses for, such funds during the period covered by the report, including a written justification for any deviation in such obligations, expenditures, or planned uses from such plan.

(b) INSPECTOR GENERAL AUDITS.—Not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, and semiannually thereafter for three years or until the Secretary has expended all covered funds, whichever occurs first, the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report examining the obligations and expenditures made using covered funds during the period covered by the report. Each such report shall include—

(1) a comparison of how the funds are being obligated and expended to how the funds were planned to be obligated and expended in the plan under subsection (a)(1);

(2) areas of waste, fraud, and abuse, if any; and

(3) any other matter the Inspector General determines relevant.

(c) COMPTROLLER GENERAL REVIEWS.—

(1) INTERIM REPORT.—Not later than September 30, 2022, the Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate an interim report containing a review of obligations and expenditures made using covered funds. The report shall include—

(A) a review of the process of the Department of Veterans Affairs for preparing the request for funds;

(B) an explanation of how the expenditure of such funds met the goals of the Department during the public health emergency for which the funds were made available;

(C) any recommendations to improve the process of identifying needs and expending funds during similar situations in the future; and

(D) a review of the plans of the Department to continue programs or investments that were begun with such funds but will continue after such funds are expended.

(2) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than September 30, 2024, the Comptroller General shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a final report on the matters specified under paragraph (1).

(d) COVERED FUNDS DEFINED.—In this section, the term “covered funds” means funds that are made available to the Department of Veterans Affairs pursuant to—

(1) the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (Public Law 116-127);

(2) the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (Public Law 116-136); or

(3) the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (Public Law 117-2).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on H.R. 2911.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support Representative BOST’s bipartisan legislation, the VA Transparency & Trust Act, for which Representative PAPPAS, Representative MANN, and I are original cosponsors.

This bill provides additional oversight for the funds Congress made available to the VA through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and the CARES Act in 2020, as well as the American Rescue Plan, which we passed earlier this year.

In addition to requiring the VA to report biweekly on how it spends these

supplemental funds, the bill mandates the VA Office of Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office to periodically report on VA’s spending of these funds.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2911 adds to the existing oversight on VA’s spending and will enable greater transparency for Congress and the public to ensure that these funds are spent efficiently and effectively to support critical VA programs and services as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2911, the VA Transparency & Trust Act of 2021.

In the American Rescue Plan, the VA requested and received \$17.1 billion in emergency funding. I demanded justification from the VA to support that funding, and very little came. I asked why the VA needed additional money since roughly \$10 billion in CARES Act funding was still available, and no one answered.

Ranking Member TRACEY MANN offered an amendment to oversee the use of those funds during the committee’s markup of the American Rescue Plan. It was voted down on party lines.

What I feared at that time I can now confirm. The American Rescue Plan has essentially become a blank check for the VA to the tune of \$17.1 billion.

H.R. 2911 would establish strict oversight and reporting requirements over all remaining COVID supplemental funds. It would also require the VA inspector general to conduct regular audits of these funds.

Lastly, it would require the GAO to conduct a complete review after all funds have been spent.

I believe these requirements are appropriate given that we are talking about tens of billions in taxpayer dollars. We should all expect full transparency on the use of these funds.

I thank Chairman PAPPAS and Ranking Member MANN for joining me in introducing this bill. I encourage all my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. PAPPAS), my good friend and the chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations.

Mr. PAPPAS. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, Ranking Member BOST, for introducing this legislation. I was proud to support it alongside my colleague, TRACEY MANN, from the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee. It is the VA Transparency & Trust Act of 2021.

Now, the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis turned our world upside down, and it hit our veteran community especially hard. The issues our veterans faced before the pandemic